
Noncommissioned Officer Development and Education: Two Hundred Years of U.S. Army Experience

By

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Two hundred and twenty four years in the making, the noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps, the heart of the United States Army today, was reviewed in September by a delegation of six visitors from the Czech Republic.

The history of the current Czech Republic dates back to the arrival of the Slavs in the sixth century, and passes through the Holy Roman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and establishment of an independent, democratic Czechoslovak state at the end of World War I in 1918. This First Republic ended with German occupation in 1938, and a brief post-war period of democracy was crushed by the Communist takeover in 1948. The wave of democratic revolution that ended the Cold War in 1989 peacefully swept away the Czechoslovak communist government as well, and led to the creation of the current parliamentary democracy. Most recently, the "Velvet Divorce" of 1993 created the independent Czech Republic and Slovakia.

On March 12, 1999, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland became members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This formal acceptance was another step in the long and difficult process of transforming the Czech armed forces. The Czech military leadership had decided two years earlier to create a western-style NCO corps, and the Military Academy in Vyskov was established for just that purpose. From September 18-30, 1999, Colonel Vladimir Sova, the first commander of the Military Academy, Vyskov, Czech Republic, and a delegation of five from the Academy visited the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), the Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, and the U.S. Army Armor Center at Fort Knox, Kentucky. The visit to the U.S., sponsored by the Deputy Under Secretary of the Army (International Affairs) and approved under the International Military Education and Training Program, gave Colonel Sova and his delegation the opportunity to see firsthand how the Army educates its NCO Corps.

The need for interoperability and potential coalition warfare requires a common uniformity among the NATO partners. Colonel Sova stated that it is the goal of the Czech Republic to be fully integrated, both in equipment and soldiers, to the maximum extent their resources and manpower will allow. It should be noted that even before the entry into NATO the Czech Republic contributed to the Desert Shield/Desert Storm campaign by deploying a 200-man decontamination unit to the region. They have been actively involved in the Balkans, with units committed to UNPROFOR, IFOR, and SFOR.

Our initial entry training and the NCO education systems are key to the success of the Army. The NCO education methodology outlined by TRADOC and how this plan is implemented at the training installations are keys to this success. The fact that there is standardization of course content at multiple locations, including recent lessons learned, emphasizes how quickly the Army is capable of adapting to new requirements. It underscored to the delegation the need to accomplish in a short time what the U.S. Army has had years to accomplish and has accomplished well. While the exact teaching instruction may differ somewhat from our tried and true method,



Delegation visit the Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas

the Czech Republic will work hard to obtain total compatibility. Among the goals following this orientation are to request a visit from the TRADOC NCO Education Branch, to send three of their Academy instructors to various NCO courses and return to begin teaching Army doctrine and tactics, and to seek out instructor exchanges.



Czech delegation reviews exercise at Fort Knox, Kentucky

The new members of NATO and those who desire to become members of the alliance must begin to plan now for the future and to dedicate their resources and training to their noncommissioned officer corps. While perhaps not mirroring our noncommissioned officer education system that was put in place in 1971, these countries are working hard to develop small unit leaders who can smoothly integrate into multinational and coalition force operations. The army of the Czech Republic has started its long journey to meet this goal. Other countries will follow in their footsteps.

About the Author

Larry E. Ogden is the International Military Training Officer, Directorate for International Development and Security Assistance, Office of the Under Secretary of the Army-International Affairs at the Pentagon, Washington, D.C. Mr. Ogden was born in 1947 in Independence, Kansas, and spent his first 24 years in Fredonia, Kansas. He attended Kansas State University majoring in horticulture with a minor in business. Mr. Ogden served with the Army during the period 1969-1971 serving in Korea and Fort Hood, Texas. After his military service, Mr. Ogden began his civil service career as a lieutenant colonel assignment specialist for the Office of Personnel Operations Field Artillery Branch. In 1976, he was promoted and moved to the White House and Congressional Correspondence Branch, Enlisted Personnel Actions Branch, Military Personnel Center. Mr. Ogden also worked for the Office of Surgeon General as a pro-pay specialist for doctor retention and payback for intern and residency programs, and later as the International Military Training Officer for the Army Surgeon General. He assumed his current position in 1985.